

Growing our Future

A' Fàs ar n-Àm ri Teachd

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Community Food Growing Strategy Ro-innleachd Fàs Bidh Coimhearsnachd



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Executive summary

'Growing our Future' is Highland's first community food growing strategy. It is part of the Highland Council's approach to supporting community empowerment and it's Health and Prosperity Strategy, achieving our net zero targets and improving the health and wellbeing of our communities.

'Community Food Growing' (CFG) should be available to every community in Highland, and we want to ensure that everyone who wants to grow their own food has the opportunity to do so.

This strategy seeks to improve the support, connectedness and access to information for growers across Highland. It will improve access to land for Community Food Growing, increase support to community groups to set up projects on Council land, and improve guidance to schools for grow your own projects on school grounds. It recognises the valuable role that Community Food Growing projects play in tackling inequalities and improving inclusion in our communities, learning from the pandemic, and in responding to the climate emergency, and seeks to build on the current momentum towards community growing and local food resilience.

The delivery of this strategy will be supported by a working action plan with partnership support, which details how we will achieve our vision that by 2027 Highland communities are resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food. The strategy is accompanied by guidance to aid groups in thinking through the development of their project and signposting to the best sources of support as they do this.

Our **Vision**

By 2027 Highland communities are resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food.

Community Food Growing

Introduction

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 aims to help empower communities across Scotland and improve access to land for those wanting to grow their own food. It is a corporate priority for The Highland Council to enable community empowerment and support more community ownership.

The Council recognises the wide-ranging benefits of community growing and through this strategy the Council seeks to inspire, promote and support community growing across the Highlands.

This strategy has been developed in the context of:

- a national vision for Scotland as a Good Food Nation;
- The Highland Council having declared a climate emergency;
- setting carbon neutral targets for our infrastructure; and
- making a commitment to improving food systems through signing the Glasgow Food and Climate declaration.

What is Community Food Growing?

Community Food Growing creates spaces where people can have access to land to grow food for themselves and others. It enables people to grow food together as part of a community, fostering social connections while providing nutritious fruit, vegetables and herbs for local consumption. Community Food Growing takes many forms such as allotments, orchards, edible towns, school growing, community gardens and more, and can run at any scale from a few trees or High Street planters to a market garden run as a social enterprise. The nature of each project varies and reflects the uniqueness of each local context and the needs and aspirations of the community.

The benefits of Community Food Growing

The benefits of Community Food Growing are endless, from improved mental health to reduced carbon footprints and saving money, to meeting new friends. Food is one thing that unites us all and improving our relationship with food can be transformative.

Health

Those involved in growing their own food eat more vegetables and this has a direct impact on physical health. At a time when vegetable consumption is below public health targets¹ it is even more important to support people and communities to connect to the land and their food.

'Growing Your Own' (GYO) and gardening also give a wonderful opportunity for people of all ages and abilities to engage in low-impact exercise and improve physical and mental health.

Green spaces and gardens offer a calm place for people to unwind from the stresses in other parts of their lives and is increasingly being prescribed as a therapy option for those suffering from mild to moderate mental illness, to assist with rehabilitation and recovery, to alleviate symptoms of dementia and to help reduce physical pain.

Environmental

Community growing spaces provide a fantastic opportunity to increase biodiversity, especially if native hedging is planted rather than fencing and companion planting and wildflowers are incorporated into plans. Food growing shouldn't just be about producing for human consumption, it can also support pollinators and provide a nourishing habitat for a range of flora and fauna.

An organic approach to community growing can help to reverse soil degradation and help to address the loss of organic matter from the soil, reduce soil compaction and erosion.

Community growing also provides opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint through reduced air miles for food transportation, reduced plastic packaging, and absorbing carbon emissions through planting orchards and soil management.



Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

Economic

Growing your own food is a great way to save money and take pressure off families on lower incomes. It also generates a sense of localism around food, encouraging the awareness of and purchase of locally grown and produced food, and so builds a food culture that benefits the local economy.

Community growing projects tend to spend grant money on local goods and services and employ local people, thereby bringing money and employment into the local area. Growing spaces also provide a fantastic opportunity for volunteers to develop a wide range of skills and therefore increase employability and individual opportunities.

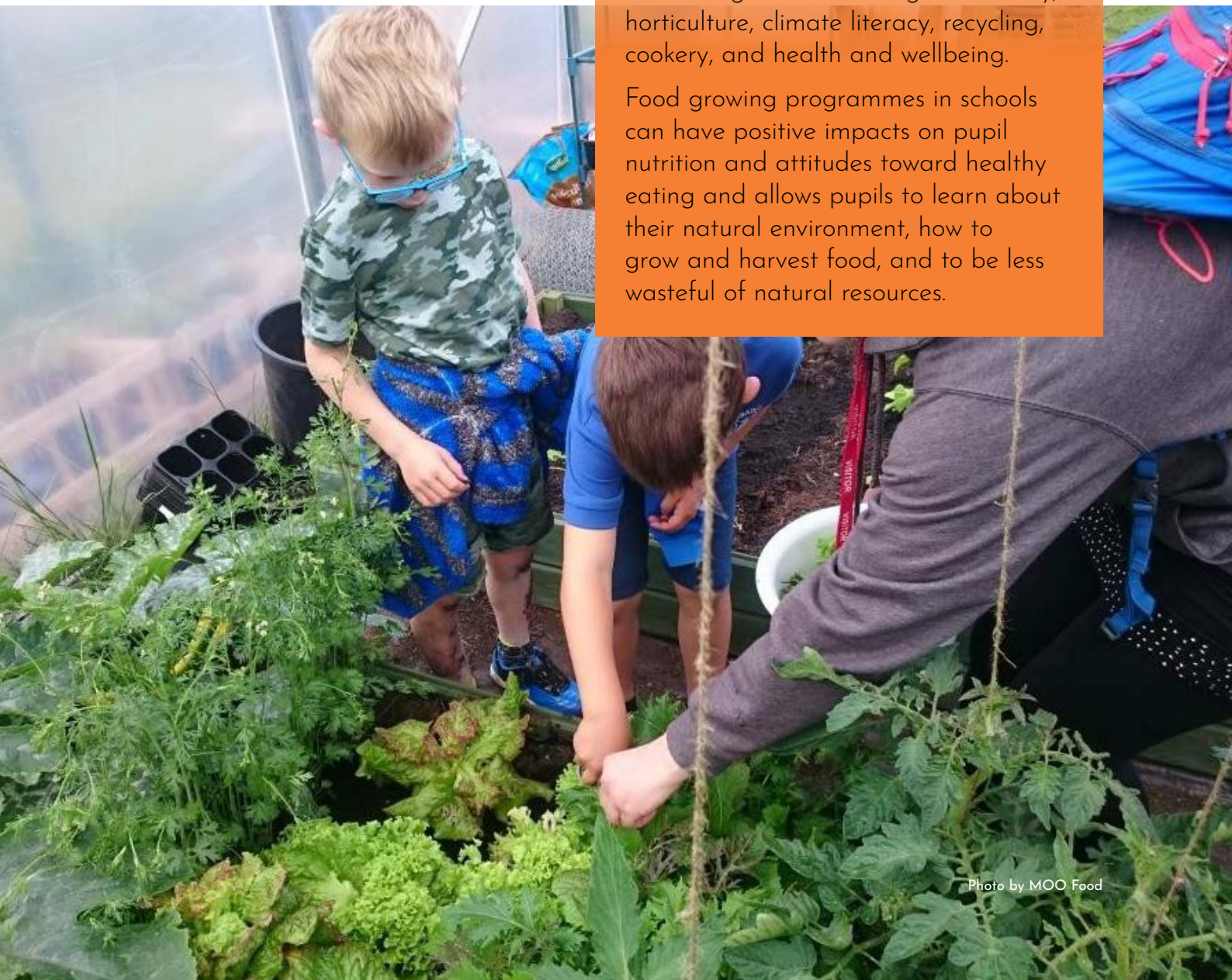
Social

Community growing provides opportunities for people to volunteer within their community and connect with those they live beside. Through events, festivals and celebrations social isolation can be reduced and a sense of place developed. When people work together in their community towards a shared goal there is increased pride and feeling of belonging.

Education

Community growing can contribute to learning, offering both practical skills development and a therapeutic environment. Food growing is for all ages and encompasses a broad range of learning areas including biodiversity, horticulture, climate literacy, recycling, cookery, and health and wellbeing.

Food growing programmes in schools can have positive impacts on pupil nutrition and attitudes toward healthy eating and allows pupils to learn about their natural environment, how to grow and harvest food, and to be less wasteful of natural resources.





This strategy

Aim of strategy

Our Vision

By 2027 Highland communities are resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food.

Our Aim

The aim of this strategy is to inspire, empower and support communities in the Highlands who want to grow their own food, through existing growing opportunities and new approaches to growing.

Our Objectives

The key objectives of the Highland Community Food Growing Strategy are:

- Build knowledge and understanding of CFG in Highland.
- Communities are empowered to start growing or expand their growing.
- Ensure communities are informed and connected, and are supported to access the resources they need.
- Identify potential allotment and growing spaces.
- Support communities to become more resilient through community food growing.

The Scope

During the consultation phases in the development of this strategy many other elements to food were discussed including small scale and community supported agriculture, crofting, local food procurement and shorter supply chains. Although all hugely valuable to local food provision these elements are out with the scope of this strategy and the intent of what this strategy aims to achieve. However, The Highland Council recognises their importance and interrelatedness and aims to contribute to the wider work on these matters through our support to the Highland Good Food Partnership, and in our commitment to the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration.

How we developed this strategy

A key priority in developing this strategy was to include the communities of Highland from the outset and to develop this strategy together. In order to achieve this, we took several approaches, including;

Community engagement events

We worked in partnership with nine community growing groups across the Highlands to host community engagement events from November 2019 to February 2020. These events were attended by interested individuals, local landowners, representatives from various groups and local food businesses.

Attendees shared their aspirations, challenges and together we highlighted opportunities and potential solutions.

These events helped us to:

- stimulate interest in CFG;
- connected interested people within communities and facilitate conversations;
- design a strategy that reflects local needs and aspirations; and
- identify various exemplar Community Food Growing projects and a wide range of community activity.

Community Food Growing Survey

For those who couldn't attend events there was an opportunity to contribute through completing an online survey from November 2019 to February 2020. This was promoted through social media, local newspapers and BBC Alba.

Survey on the draft strategy

A public consultation on the draft version of this strategy took place in early 2021 and comments were considered in the final version.



Potting Photo by Zoe Schaeffer on Unsplash

Learning from the pandemic

During the pandemic the Council gathered information through a framework for participation and involvement about communities' responses to the pandemic, which has helped us to better understand the impact of COVID-19 and observe communities' shift in approach to food resilience.



Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

Site visits

To get an accurate feel for what was happening on the ground we visited several different types of Community Food Growing sites. These included, TBI Culbokie Community Allotments, Ullapool Allotments, Helmsdale Kitchen Garden, MOO Food, Inverness Botanic Gardens, Nairn's Community Orchard, Inverness High School Farm and Caiplich Farm (a small holding).

Highland Council Officer workshops

As the subject of food touches all aspects of public policy from education to planning and from communities to finance, we facilitated multi-disciplinary workshops with officers from 14 Highland Council departments. This afforded the opportunity to come up with Council-wide priorities and agreed actions.

Schools survey

Head Teachers and key staff involved in food growing in schools were surveyed to better understand the opportunities, barriers and needs of schools to develop and deliver food growing.

Informal engagement with partners

There have been discussions throughout the process with key partners checking our understanding and gaining informal feedback as the strategy has developed. See appendix 1 for a full list of partners consulted.



Strong Communities



Photo by MOO Food

Community food growing brings people together and helps enhance social connections, while also increasing our sense of belonging and pride in place. It can create sources of free food within communities, add locally produced nutritious food to emergency food provision, increase food growing skills and learning opportunities, and for some with a social enterprise interest can provide an income to support the wider charitable work of the organisation (see case studies in the accompanying guidance document “Initial guidance to accompany Growing Our Future”).

Community response to climate change

Growing food together within a community helps build resilience, knowledge and confidence. A changing climate will impact communities across the Highlands, so it is of paramount importance that communities have the capacity to come together to respond to, withstand and recover from adverse situations.

Community growing offers a wonderful platform for developing understanding of climate change within communities. It creates opportunities to discuss some of the factors involved in climate change such as our behaviours around food; purchasing, cooking and waste, the way that our wider society manages land; soil management, choice of crops and farming practices, and the impact that our food supply networks have on the environment. Increased awareness results in people understanding the environmental impacts of human activities and being able to make informed choices. Studies show that

people are less likely to waste food that they grow, and they are more likely to put Growing Your Own waste in compost, thereby returning nutrients to the soil and further reducing their carbon footprint.



Photo by MOO Food

The COVID-19 pandemic and food resilience

The need for emergency food provision across Highland, Scotland and beyond, increased dramatically during the pandemic, and there are still so many unknowns regarding the longer-term impacts on poverty and access to food following the pandemic. Communities have responded to these challenges and increased vulnerability in their communities, positively and wholeheartedly. Many new community groups have sprung up and existing groups, not previously focussed on food security, have diversified to support the local response to food provision. Community larders and fridges have become more common and include reducing food waste as part of their aims. The scope of the role of emergency food provision to meet local need and demand is out with this strategy. Community Food Growing interweaves with food poverty. Through Community Food Growing projects, partnerships have emerged

between community growing and food banks, and individuals who have surpluses of home-grown food are sharing through community fridges. See the case studies in the supporting guidance for examples of what's happening in Highland.

Community Food Growing on the scale discussed in this strategy is not at a level of production that would address food emergencies across Highland, nor can emergency food provision in general be the sole answer to food poverty. However, community food growing can be of support to those groups that are responding to food insecurity, and who believe it is of interest to the people that they assist. With The Highland Council working more closely than ever with community groups to support emergency food provision we aim to support these groups in their food growing ambitions and to become part of wider community resilience planning.



Food deliveries during 2020 lockdown - Dingwall HUB. Photo by Molly Fearn

Culture change -building on the momentum

The pandemic has also impacted the number of people who have been growing their own food. There are many factors affecting the rise in food growing; more time at home, loss of other activities, increased appreciation for gardens and green space and connection with nature affecting our sense of wellbeing during stressful times. There has also been an increased awareness around food supply chains and the potential vulnerabilities out with our control that impact on our access to food. This all provides opportunities for community growing.

In order to adapt to a changing world, we as individuals and communities need to shift what is normal. Community growing is a wonderful way to practice and embed a culture that prioritises values such as sharing, kindness and support, moving individuals and communities towards

helping each other and making our communities more resilient.

More opportunities for Community

Food Growing and a stronger network of groups in Highland will increase the visibility of projects and improve the ability of individuals to connect to local activities. Once people start to realise that by lending their support to Community Food Growing they can save money, develop their own skills, share the workload, benefit the planet, connect to their community, support others and benefit their own mental and physical health then a culture shift towards Community Food Growing becoming the norm will be seen.



Photo by MOO Food

Opportunities to promote inclusion and improve wellbeing

Community Food Growing projects provide an opportunity to bring together people from different backgrounds and of all abilities. Many of the case studies that feature in the accompanying guidance for this strategy illustrate how growing spaces in our communities can create inclusive, welcoming places that provide positive experiences for anyone to participate in activities that benefit their health and wellbeing. Taking steps to encourage participation of different groups, and to consider accessibility in the design and development of projects can contribute to the aim of developing stronger communities.

Community Planning Partners in Highland are committed through the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan to reduce inequality and to tackle the issues that lead to inequalities. Through our work with the Highland Green Health Partnership, community growing will be promoted as a valuable part of reducing health inequalities and improving mental wellbeing in Highland. The Green Health Partnership has a focus on mental health and health inequalities and seeks to co-ordinate activity across sectors to better connect the delivery of health outcomes with the health-improving potential of the natural environment.

Community Growing

Community growing in the Highlands

There is a wide range of community growing models present across the Highlands, with communities designing projects in-line with local needs and opportunities. Below is a summary of the various models and examples of how this is happening in Highland. Further information on the projects mentioned can be found in the case studies section in the accompanying guidance document. The Highland Food Activity Map lists a wider range of current projects across the region. Projects not listed and can be added by contacting the Community Food Growing Coordinator.

Highland Food Activity Map:
www.highlandgoodfood.scot/food-map

Networks

Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP)

Highland Good Food Partnership started off as a conversation between different food sector stakeholders in the Highlands. A conference was held in the winter of early 2021 and lots of project groups were started and key areas of work identified. The Highland Good Food Partnership now has a multi-faceted role, supporting different projects, collaborating with numerous Highland partners – public, private and charities – to achieve the goals set out from the beginning: to collaborate with locals to create a sustainable, local food system. The partnership works around four main areas of focus: health and wellbeing, education and training, local food economy and community food. With only two part-time employees the partnership wouldn't run without the engagement and input of all the partners and individuals contributing their time and energy.



Allotments

Allotments are plots of land made available for non-commercial gardening and food growing, leased out by an individual or community group for that sole purpose. Anyone interested in having an allotment, can search the Highland Food Activity Map for locations near them. If there is a waiting list, there are other growing opportunities to consider, such as community orchards and community gardens.

Loch Broom and Ullapool Growing Group (LUGG) - Community Allotments

LUGG was started by some active members of the Ullapool community in 2010 with an aim to provide space for growing food for local people. Grant funding provided money for a beautiful tool shed, compost toilet, polytunnel and materials for outdoor raised beds. Since this there has been further development, including, a deer fence, water system and solar panels in a polytunnel to charge the water pump. LUGG has been used by community groups for various projects including mental health and children's groups and the hope is that in the future more people can use the allotments.



Photo by LUGG allotments

Knocknagael Allotments and Green Hub

The project is seeking to respond to the demand in Inverness for community growing spaces, and seeks to benefit social and health needs, and climate and environmental challenges. This area of Inverness is identified for strategic growth over the next 20 years, but currently community food growing spaces are lacking. At the time of writing Knocknagael Ltd is applying to the Scottish Government for a Community Asset Transfer of an area of farmland to transform into a large scale allotments site, an orchard, areas for walking and wildlife and green space for the benefit of the community. The Highland Council has also approved part of Knocknagael Farm to be allocated for Housing and Community (Food Growing) uses in the Proposed Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2. While this means the mechanism for how food growing is delivered in this area is not yet fully established, both options provide the local community the opportunity to realise their ambitions in this part of the city in the coming years.

Community gardens

A community garden is a joint effort among interested parties to create a green space where all people involved share part of the upkeep and garden rewards. There are lots of different kinds of community gardens from therapeutic gardens to public beds for growing vegetables, fruits, herbs and flowers. There is a range of inspiring examples across the Highlands, many of which also run elements of social enterprise.

Raasay Walled Garden

The long-neglected garden is slowly being restored since coming into community ownership. It now grows local produce and flowers for residents, local businesses and visitors in polytunnels and outside beds and also operate a community food waste compost scheme with the local primary school. The garden is open to the public and provides a beautiful amenity space for locals and visitors. During the pandemic the community realised what an important asset the garden was and were able to increase the amount of produce grown. Customer numbers increased as they had access to fresh seasonal produce without having to leave the island. Volunteer numbers also increased and helped alleviate the isolation felt by many who were able to participate and help in a safe outdoor environment. They also removed set prices for produce and offered it on a donation basis, ensuring that no one was excluded due to their financial circumstances.



Photo by Raasay Walled Garden

Badenoch and Strathspey Therapeutic Gardens

This is a small charity which provides social and therapeutic horticultural activities at growing spaces within a local allotment site, beside a Medical Centre and at tabletop gardening sessions at three Care Homes/Day Centres across the area. Elderly people, many of whom have dementia relate to the gardening and associated craft work that is completed at the sessions. People who may have various disabilities attend the Growing Spaces and Hospital Therapy Garden, where they enjoy the time together. They learn to grow a variety of flowers, fruit, herbs and vegetables and take produce home to cook and enjoy.



Photo by B&S Therapy Garden

Helmsdale Kitchen Garden

The Helmsdale Kitchen Garden project commenced in January 2014 with the aims of stimulating interest and the encouragement of participation in horticulture both at home and on site. This addresses a desire to educate and advocate the benefits of environmentally sustainable gardening. The project also aims to advance a retail, educational and health facility for the community and visitors by establishing community led horticultural activities, including and not restricted to allotments, orchard, health benefiting gardens, exercise trails and art installations.



Photo by Helmsdale Kitchen Garden

Thurso Grows

Thurso Grows is operated by Thurso Community Development Trust and includes running a community garden space of 1000m² and associated workshops on composting, gardening and food waste minimisation. The project promotes local produce and encourages people to grow at home while taking a community aspect to sharing food. They are now working on a social enterprise and, with Thurso Community Benefit Society as their trading arm, are about to launch Socially Growing. An asset transfer of Highland Council's Greenhouses in Thurso and the creation of a Zero Waste Refill Shop will see commercial growing take place and a business which will support the community growing part of the project in the long term.



Photo by Thurso Grows

Inverness Botanic Gardens – The GROW Project

The GROW project is a therapeutic garden, created by and for people with additional support needs – mainly learning disabilities. It is a healthy, positive and beautiful educational and working environment, enabling people to work meaningfully and enjoyably towards reaching their potential. There is a large vegetable plot, a fruit cage, polytunnels, a wildflower meadow and wildlife gardens and ponds. The project is open to the public, through the Botanic Gardens. The team work with the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society offering trainees an individual-centred course – 'Grow and Learn'. Since the COVID-19 crisis began, they have diverted resources into supporting local food charities, such as Inverness Foodstuffs and Crown Cupboard. There is good collaboration and they hope to improve upon the variety and seasons they can offer free food.



Photo by Grow project Botanics

Community orchards

A community orchard is a collection of fruit trees shared by communities which grow in publicly accessible areas. As well as being a source of delicious, tasty and nutritious fruit for many generations, orchards also provide a place to learn, exchange knowledge, hold celebrations or seek quiet contemplation.

MOO Food - Community Orchard

In 2018 MOO Food was funded by Highland Council's Carbon Clever Fund to plant an orchard of 50 mixed fruit trees in an underused green space in Muir of Ord. The trees were planted for the community by the community and the space is now used for workshops, village gatherings and festivals.



Photo by MOO Food

Wester Ross Growing Communities Association - Pocket Orchards

This project plants community fruit trees in Wester Ross townships from Kinlochewe to Dundonnell. Accessible to all ages and abilities, providing small public spaces with Spring blossom, Summer shade and shelter, and free Autumn fruit for all. There are now about 240 orchard trees in Wester Ross communities from

Plockton to Ullapool. Most of the pocket orchards are quite small - perhaps 6-9 trees. They are there both for community and environmental benefit. Many of the local schools now have pocket orchards: the biggest one so far is at Gairloch High School, with 37 trees.



Photo by Wester Ross Growing Communities Association

Edible towns/villages

Edible villages are a simple idea; take over underused or unattractive bits of public land to plant food to feed the community. The food growing could be fruit trees or bushes, raised beds, herb gardens or planters. Everyone in the community has the opportunity to benefit from this style of growing initiative, as anyone can harvest produce and enjoy the tasty delights.

MOO Incredible Edible

MOO Food is a community led charity in Muir of Ord that facilitates community food growing all over the village. The MOO Incredible Edible project has 25 growing boxes in various locations filled with seasonal fruit, herbs and vegetables as well as a large orchard and several pocket orchards. A diverse mix of groups are involved in the planting, maintaining and loving these growing spaces.



Photo by MOO Food

Let's Grow Ballifeary-Bught

This is a small Highland Council tenant-led project which started during COVID-19 (Autumn 2020) to provide a positive outdoor activity during COVID-19 restrictions that local people could take part in. With concerns during COVID-19 about availability of food in the shops, the project showed that it is possible to grow a range of healthy and tasty vegetables and salad leaves etc easily in Inverness. The project has made

healthy vegetables and salad available free of charge to anyone who wants to use them and turned an unused and quite sad-looking outdoor space in an area with high local footfall into a new community focal point which people could enjoy.



Before the project started

October 2020

Photos by Let's Grow Ballifeary-Bught

School growing projects

Growing projects in schools have numerous benefits; not only is it a wonderful opportunity to up-skill the next generation and connect young people to food, but through schools a significant section of the community can be targeted, with parents and wider family members becoming involved. School communities also provide a pool of willing, enthusiastic volunteers.

Growing food permeates all areas of the curriculum, though it is specifically beneficial to health and wellbeing. Having a school garden links to the science experiences and outcomes of biodiversity and interdependence, the processes of the planet and investigations into the role of microorganisms through composting.

Inverness High School - School Farm

Inverness High School has operated a school farm since 2006, with 3 polytunnels, 8 planting beds and an outdoor classroom. The key aims of the projects are; increasing the farm's biodiversity, maintaining small scale crop and food production for educational purposes, developing practical gardening and maintenance skills with the pupils and developing pupils' enterprise skills through the sale of school farm produce. They became the first school in Scotland to build their own wood fired clay pizza oven. The pupils in the senior enterprise class helped design and construct a pizza oven which is used every term as a way of celebrating pupil achievements.

Photos by Inverness High School Farm



The Farmer Jones Academy

The Farmer Jones Academy works closely with schools to build relationships with pupils and teachers, creating growing spaces to give students hands-on experience through to practical business skills such as market research, brand awareness and web design. The Academy also delivers Food and Drink Technologies Foundation Apprenticeships which is equivalent to 2 Higher qualifications or more.

Plot to Plate

Based at Invergordon Academy, Plot to Plate, is a community garden, where volunteers are encouraged to grow their own vegetables in raised beds and the polytunnel. Regular cooking sessions are held throughout the summer months where the produce is harvested and then transformed into healthy, low cost, tasty meals. They have also teamed up with the Academy's Rural Skills pupils who help with the beds, growing their own produce in a new bed that they have prepared. The project is open to anyone although the most disadvantaged members of the community are targeted. This encourages people to get out of their house, meet other people and to lead a healthier lifestyle without costing any money.

Inverness College ABC Garden

The Active Botanic Community (ABC) Garden aims to transform underused space within campus grounds to develop a community and educational garden project, alongside an outdoor gym and recreational play facilities. The project will be accessible to all, with a focus on children and young people that have experienced or are currently experiencing challenges in their lives.

Through 'drop-in' and interactive sessions held within the garden, the project aims to act as a sustainable resource to improve the lives of the community by improving individuals' health and wellbeing.

Resourcing

Staffing and support

The Council has committed a staff post in support of this strategy and its implementation until July 2023. This officer will co-ordinate activity to implement the strategy, working with other Council staff and community partners to deliver key actions. Continued staff capacity to support community groups in their project development and to work with other Council officers to progress the strategy following this date, is likely to be required.

Funding

Community food growing projects are led by community groups and volunteers who, as third sector organisations, require grant funding support to set up and maintain their projects. Funding streams within the Council are already sought and applied to for elements of this funding. This demand is likely to increase as more projects are initiated and develop and the Council should consider this need in forthcoming funding streams related to climate change adaptation, biodiversity enhancement, health and wellbeing, community development and food security. Local Place Based funding will help to support this approach.

Within the action plan there is a commitment to explore the creation of a fund designated to support the small early costs incurred by group when investigating feasibility and planning their projects, such as legal costs for taking out a lease, land title investigations and planning application costs.

Land

Access to land is of high importance to community food growing initiatives and so land resources will be required as new projects begin and existing projects expand. The Council is committed through this strategy and through the Community Empowerment Act 2015, to make suitable land available to community food growing projects where possible and applicable. This will require coordination across services to agree approaches and processes to Council land acquisition by community groups. This will require a proactive approach from Council teams when: designating land within local development plans, when working on new housing developments and considering repurposing of existing community spaces to consider how community food growing needs and requirements can be incorporated.

Action Plan

The outcomes of the community engagement exercise coupled with meetings and workshops with officers has resulted in a series of actions being identified to address the main challenges and opportunities across the Highlands. This action plan is intended to be a working document and will be reviewed periodically throughout the lifetime of this strategy.



Objective 1: Build knowledge and understanding of Community Food Growing in Highland

One of the biggest challenges identified, which is experienced across the whole region, is the gap in knowledge, confidence and the feeling of being isolated in respect of Growing Your Own. To support our food growing community it is imperative to engender a culture of working together, promoting opportunities so that individuals can find their local groups, supporting and adding value to existing groups rather than starting up new entities and enabling peer support between groups across Highland. There is a wealth of knowledge, ideas and enthusiasm out there, it just needs to be brought together and shared.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Support the development and delivery of a Highland Community Food Growing Network.	The Highland Council in partnership with the third sector as part of the Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP).	Ongoing	Staff time to support HGFP to develop and coordinate activity.
Develop and maintain CFG map highlighting all activity across the region.	The Highland Council and HGFP	Ongoing	Work through Highland Food Growing Network sub-group of the HGFP, with support from Highland Council CFG coordinator to map projects and add to map.
Pilot a community learning and development GYO project.	High Life Highland	2022-2024	Staff time
Develop CFG webpage on THC website to host above information .	The Highland Council	2022	CFG Coordinator time to develop and update.
Highland wide guidance for CFG groups.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Hosted on Highland Good Food Partnership website.
Raising awareness with Community Partnerships of how CFG supports their priorities and outcomes.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Staff time and online resources.

Objective 2: Communities are empowered to start growing or expand their growing

Having enough volunteers, with the right skills and sufficient available time was identified as a challenge across all areas of the consultation. There are opportunities going forward for projects to link up and share volunteer expertise. There are also many people who garden individually that have skills, time and the desire to contribute to a community project, which should be encouraged through awareness raising and support from Council officers and our partners. Support for schools' growing projects and links between schools and the community was also raised as an important area to build on.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Encourage individuals to join existing groups.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Develop CFG Highland Council webpage, develop through HGFP.
Encourage communities and individuals to explore CFG opportunities for their community.	The Highland Council and the HGFP	Ongoing	Community interest. Support from CFG Coordinator, Community Support and engagement Team and Tenant Participation Officers. HGFP project group time.
Encourage Grow Your Own projects in schools across Highland.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Staff time to develop guidance for teachers and support from third sector. Support for Education staff. In partnership with community groups.
Develop guidance for cooking and eating Grow Your Own in schools	The Highland Council	2022-2027	Staff time.
Green Young Leadership Programme	Pilot by High Life Highland	2022-2027	Staff to drive pilot in HLH.

Objective 3: Ensure communities are informed and connected, and are supported to access the resources they need

Several communities highlighted the need to work together in Highland as a wider community of growers. Which brings opportunity to share resources and tools. Developing a platform for sharing, will not only help communities save money but will also bring people together and reduce excessive consumption.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Work with communities to set up Tool Libraries.	High Life Highland	Pilot 2022-2025	Library staff trained and onboard.
Signpost communities and individuals to various online resources, funds and other organisations.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	CFG Coordinator time to review and select most useful resources, developing a resource bank and making those easily accessible. Info circulated and hosted on HGFP.
Encourage groups and individuals to work together and share resources.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Through Highland Good Food Partnership.
Include a trial site involving food growing in the biochar and carbon sequestration project.	Highland Council Climate Change team	2022-2023	As part of existing project. Officer time to expand to include food growing and share learning with community food groups.

Objective 4: To identify potential allotment and growing spaces

Several communities throughout the region reported difficulty in accessing suitable land for Growing Your Own, many also felt overwhelmed and didn't know where to find out about land availability or who to ask. It is important to ensure everyone across the Highlands feels supported and empowered to access land for Growing Your Own.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Carry out a green space audit and safeguard valued greenspace (including where there is potential for CFG) with each Local Plan review.	Highland Council Planning Service	2022	Development Planning team staff time.
Develop Green Space Map to include land that has been identified as suitable for CFG.	Highland Council Planning Service	2022-2025	Development Planning team staff time.
Explore opportunities to identify land with Community Planning Partners.	Highland Community Partnership	2022-2023	Staff time to support.
Explore development of a fund to support community food growing permissions (e.g. Title Investigations, planning permission etc).	The Highland Council	2022-2023	A small 'seed' budget will be required.
Produce specific guidance on council processes and the options available to CFG groups that want to access THC land.	Highland Council policy team	2022	Small amount of CAT team and CFG Coordinator time.
Provide simple occupancy agreements for smaller scale projects using Council land.	Highland Council Housing team	2022-2023	Staff time for a cross service working group.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Consider the provision of space for community food growing in large and strategic housing developments.	Highland Council - Infrastructure and Environment Team	2022-2027	Ongoing as part of consideration of assessment process.
Co-location of services - promoting CFG opportunities beside libraries, community centres and sport centres.	High Life Highland	2022-2027	Staff training to support enquiries from public.
Consider CFG as an alternative use of play space as part of the review of play areas.	Highland Council Communities and Place Service	Dec 2022	Staff briefing and guidance required.
Promote GYO guidance on contaminated land.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Website downloadable resource.
Provide free advice to community groups on contaminated land.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Contaminated land team time.
Review Provision and Management of Allotments.	The Highland Council	2022-2025	Staff time - Community Food Growing Coordinator and Community Support and Engagement team.
Review guidance for community groups growing in school grounds to make it easier and less prohibitive.	The Highland Council	2023	Staff time.
Support Private Public Partnership schools in negotiating the use of their land for food growing.	The Highland Council	2022-2027	Estates team time.
Explore the development of guidance on planning requirements for Community Food Growing.	The Highland Council	2022-2023	Planning team time.

Objective 5: Support communities to become more resilient through community food growing

Community Food Growing can play a role in making our communities more inclusive, improving social connections, providing benefits to mental health, wellbeing and creating accessible public spaces designed with all abilities in mind. Community Food Growing can also be a part of the community response to food insecurity. It can contribute to what community food providers offer, including locally grown nutritious food to emergency food provision.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Develop guidance for CFG projects to consider promoting inclusion and tackling inequalities in the design of their project.	The Highland Council and the Green Health Partnership	2022-23	Staff time.
Support interested groups that coordinate emergency food provision to add CFG elements to their work.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Staff time to collaborate with community food providers network, CFINE/Fairshare, Trussell Trust and HTSI.
Encourage CFG groups to be involved with community planning for emergencies.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Community Support and Engagement team, working with HSTI.
Consider geographic areas of socio-economic deprivation when making land available for CFG where possible.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Staff awareness of areas of socio-economic deprivation.
Promote CFG as a green health activity within health and social care referral pathways.	Green Health Partnership	Ongoing	Staff time to participate in the Green Health Partnership and to connect health and social care practitioners with the community food growing network.

Additional Actions

Other actions that don't fit into the key categories:

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Progress the Glasgow Food & Climate Declaration commitments.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Policy team and climate change team staff time to work with partners through HGFP and with other council officers.
Review Highland Food Growing Strategy.	The Highland Council	2027	Staff time or resource to commission a consultant.

Accompanying guidance

Initial accompanying guidance to support this strategy is available through the Council's website. This will be reviewed as delivery of the strategy progresses and covers full case studies of some of the projects mentioned above, and assistance with:

- Setting up a group and managing volunteers
- Support and training
- Funding
- Working with schools and young people
- Finding and securing suitable land
- Promoting inclusion and wellbeing.

A Food Growing Strategy -Guidance document can be found here:

www.bit.ly/FoodGrowingStrategy-GuidanceDocument

Appendices

1 Stakeholders involved in shaping this strategy

Representatives from the following organisations have helped to shape the Highland Council's first Community Food Growing Strategy:

Badenoch and Strathspey Therapeutic Gardens

Green Hive Nairn

Helmsdale Kitchen Garden

Highland Green Health Partnership

Highland Third Sector Interface

High Life Highland

Inverness College UHI

Lochaber Environment Group

MOO Food

Planet Sutherland

Raasay Development Trust

Social Farms and Gardens

Transition Black Isle

Thurso Grows

Ullapool Community Trust

Viewfield Garden Collective

2 National strategic context

Meeting national aspirations through community growing

Community growing projects will help us fulfil our obligations under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and help deliver a range of other strategic priorities across the Council area:

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

Section 119 of the Community Empowerment Act places a duty on every local authority to prepare a food growing strategy for its area. This must:

- Identify land that may be used as allotment sites;
- Identify other areas of land that could be used for community growing; and
- Describe how the authority intends to increase provision, in particular in areas which experience socio-economic disadvantage.

Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration

The Declaration brings together all types and sizes of local authorities to speak with a unified voice in renewing their commitments to develop sustainable food policies, promote mechanisms for joined-up action and to call on national governments to put food and farming at the heart of the global response to the climate emergency.

The Highland Council signed the Declaration following the passing of a motion at a meeting of the Council on 24th June 2021. It was one of the first local authorities in Scotland to join this global movement, recognising it as an important step forward in our regional climate action journey and has made the following commitments.

- Commitment 1 - developing and implementing integrated food policies and strategies;
- Commitment 2 - reducing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions from urban and regional food systems;
- Commitment 3 - calling on national governments to establish supportive and enabling policy frameworks and multi-level and multi-actor governance mechanisms.

The Growing our Future - Community Food Growing Strategy is an important element of the Council's work towards achieving these commitments.

Scottish Government Good Food Nation Bill

The Scottish Government set a vision for Scotland, that by 2025 Scotland will be:

“a Good Food Nation, where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day.”

Our Growing our Future strategy contributes to this aim by creating a culture of interest in food; promoting knowledge about what constitutes good food, valuing freshly grown local food and improving access to healthy food and the skills to grow your own.

National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3)

This sets more localised food distribution networks. The Central Scotland Green Network is a national development in NPF3 with community growing identified as one of the priority themes for action.

Scottish Planning Policy

The Scottish Government has stated that Scottish Planning Policy should be used to routinely incorporate new growing space into new development plans.

Natural Health Service

Scotland's natural environment is a resource that can be used to help tackle some of our key health issues. Our Natural Health Service aims to show how greater use of the outdoors can help to tackle physical inactivity, mental health issues and health inequalities. A range of partners across environment, transport, sport, education and health are involved.

3 Draft strategy consultation questions

- Q1.** Do you agree with Growing Our Future's strategy objectives and vision?
If not, what should these be?
- Q2.** Have we picked the right priority actions and approach to encourage and support more community growing in Highland?
If not, what should we be doing instead?
- Q3.** Have we clearly set out the steps you can take to grow your own in Highland, if you don't do so already?
If not, how can this guidance be improved?
- Q4.** Are you aware of any other support for groups interested in community growing which isn't detailed within the draft strategy?
- Q5.** Does the draft strategy clearly set out how to find and secure suitable land for food growing?
- Q6.** Where do you live?
- Q7.** What is your gender?
- Q8.** What is your age?